

THE HOUSTON POST

Agency THURSDAY
★ Jan. 31, 1985 **25¢**

seeks hunt for buried waste pits

Official cites danger of contaminated water

By HAROLD SCARLETT
Post Environment Writer

An old pesticide plant site in northeast Houston may contain buried waste pits that could contaminate groundwater, a state hazardous waste official said Wednesday.

Fred C. Dalbey of the Texas Department of Water Resources said the TDWR wants an investigation that would include ground borings to detect any covered-up waste pits that could leach hazardous pesticides into shallow groundwater.

Dalbey said the search for waste pits will be one of the cleanup requirements the TDWR will send within a couple of weeks to the Olin Corp., which operated the pesticide plant from 1950 to 1972, and the current property owners.

He said a 1982 seismic study for the Environmental Protection Agency and a review of old aerial photographs showed anomalies indicating there may be several buried waste pits on the property.

The hazardous waste site at 7621 Wallisville Road — known to government agencies since late 1980 — is still awaiting a cleanup even though there is heavy pesticide contamination in surrounding drainage ditches where children play and pick berries. A few homes are within about 100 feet of the most heavily contaminated area.

After almost four years without getting a cleanup going, the Environmental Protection Agency turned the job over to the TDWR in mid-1984, but it did not supply a complete case file to the state agency until last October.

Dalbey said if Olin and the current property owners do not agree to join in the state-proposed cleanup within a fixed period, probably 30 days, he will consult with TDWR attorneys on the best course to achieve the quickest cleanup.

He said that could be a state suit in an effort to force a cleanup, or nomination of the site to the

Agency seeks hunt for waste pits

Continued from page 1A

national priority list for a cleanup with Superfund money. The responsible parties could then be sued later to recover cleanup costs.

Spokesmen for Olin, however, say the chemical company will not start any voluntary cleanup as long as a complex federal court suit to fix responsibility for the pesticide contamination is pending.

Olin in 1973 sold the 18.6-acre property to the Eureka Investment Corp., a subsidiary of Mustang Tractor & Equipment Co., which now has a distributorship on part of the site. In 1978, Eureka sold the 9-acre eastern half of the site to the Southern Pacific Transportation Co. for a truck trailer parking lot.

Eureka is now suing Olin, and Southern Pacific is suing Eureka, Mustang and Olin. Both plaintiffs claim the pesticide contamination was concealed from them when they purchased the property — a charge that Olin denies.

Olin claims it left storage tanks labeled "toxaphene" and unused pesticide packaging at the site, where it formulated products from pesticides manufactured elsewhere.

Olin in 1982, at EPA's request, submitted a cleanup plan that would cost an estimated \$132,450.

Regional EPA spokesman Roger Meacham said the EPA in ensuing conferences informed Olin the plan was inadequate, but the EPA never formally responded to Olin's plan in writing with specific cleanup requirements.

"Because of the crunch of handling higher-priority Superfund sites with a limited staff," Meacham said, "we were never able to do additional work that we would have liked to do."

Clarence Johnson, a TDWR field investigator familiar with the site, predicted an adequate cleanup will cost at least \$1 million, perhaps much more.

File records show Olin, when it closed the pesticide packaging plant, sent two truckloads of wastes and debris to a fertilizer plant it then operated on the Houston Ship Channel in Pasadena. The pesticide wastes were buried in one of that plant's huge piles of gray gypsum wastes north of the La Porte Freeway.

"That was not illegal under the regulations then in effect," Johnson said, "but they couldn't do it now without special permission from the TDWR."

The file also shows Eureka Investment, in clearing the plant site, hired a Dallas contractor to remove some debris and material from the plant site. Eureka told the EPA it also hired Olshan Demolishing Co. to dismantle some remaining pesticide plant buildings and equipment and haul away the debris.

Eureka said the Dallas contractor can no longer be found, and no one now knows what happened to the material hauled away by Olshan.

The EPA, in a site investigation in early 1981, found several piles of trash from the cleared site, spaced along a drainage ditch on a Houston Belt & Terminal Railway right-of-way along the east side of the plant site.

After one trash sample showed 102,000 parts per million of toxaphene pesticide, HB&T at the EPA's request quickly had the trash piles, which filled seven 55-gallon drums, hauled away to a licensed landfill.

But other samples from the area of the unfenced drainage ditch showed up to 41,300 ppm of toxaphene at a depth of two feet, and ground surface concentrations of up to 2,130 ppm of DDT.



987157

OLIN CORP. - S. P. Olin Inc.
760000607618